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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a workshop which was designed to: (1) help participants participants the positive learn and/or enhance specific skills related to effective interpersonal communication; (2) provide opportunities for participants to examine their personal styles of interacting/teaching, give and receive feedback, identify areas in need of change, and work toward behavioral change; and (3) explore issues specific to multicultural communication. Specific areas addressed include attentiveness in interpersonal communication, listening skills, effective use of verbal and nonverbal behavior, awareness of culturally specific communication patterns, empathy development, behavioral approaches to respect, and action strategies. Activities which were conducted to help participants develop their skills in each of these areas are described. Participant response is discussed and general conclusions concerning communication and its role in multicultural education are summarized. (Author/EB)

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Communication Skills for Elementary Teachers-Staff:
A Program Model For Multicultural Emphasis And Case Presentation

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Teacher growth is an important dimension in creating and maintaining a positive learning environment. This growth is facilitated by procedures which allow for the acquisition of new skills and subsequent application of these to the educational setting, the illumination and enhancement of extant strengths, and the opportunity for peer interaction as well as feedback.

The educational workshop provides a forum for accomplishing these ends and serves as a valuable adjunct to teacher growth. The objectives of this particular educational workshop are:

- 1) To help participants learn and/or enhance specific skills related to effective interpersonal communication.
- 2) To provide the opportunity for participants to examine their particular styles of interacting/teaching, give and receive feedback, identify areas in need of change, and work toward behavioral change.
- 3) To explore issues specific to multicultural communication.

General Approach and Methods

This is a behavioral workshop where participants learn by doing. Specific areas included are: attentiveness in interpersonal communication, listening skills, effective use of verbal and non-verbal behavior, awareness of culturally specific communication patterns, empathy development,

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behavioral approaches to respect and action strategies. These are explored via participation in specific structured exercises aimed at illuminating current interactional style, identification of effective and ineffective methods now utilized, and subsequent feedback. New techniques are taught and specific behavioral interventions suggested for identified target behaviors. Principles involved in the maintenance and change of behavior are taught. In this way, participants are able to apply these techniques to classroom and parent groups.

Planned Procedures

- 1) To increase awareness to communication in general and increase sensitivity to multicultural patterns of communication by use of relevant audio-visual material.
- 2) The following ice breaker is designed to foster familiarity with other workshop participants as well as to identify workshop needs and goals:
 - a. Divide participants into triads and proceed as outlined below.

SPEAKER	LISTENER	OBSERVER
1. Identify yourself	1. Listen, ask questions, clarify, etc.	1. Observe
2. State goals and needs for this workshop	2. Listen, ask questions, clarify, etc.	2. Observe.
3. Tell what another needs to know about you to understand how, why you communicate as you do.	3. Recreate and summarize speaker's message	3. Confirm listener's recreation of speaker's message.
4. Reverse roles and repeat #1, #2 and #3 above, (i.e., until each person has played the role of speaker, listener and observer)		
5. Process (discuss, analyze, illuminate learnings) in large group		

3) The next area of focus is listening skills:

- a. To illustrate the physical components of actively listening, a role-playing activity is demonstrated. A participant is selected at random and instructed to talk about a favorite leisure activity. Throughout this activity the facilitator assumes an inactive listening posture, e.g., does not maintain eye contact, postures away from the participant, etc. As the role play continues the participant will squirm, stop talking, look uncomfortable or otherwise indicate that she/he does not feel listened to during the activity.
- b. Following a. above the physical components (See Eagen, 1977) of the active listening posture are demonstrated:

S-face person squarely
 O-maintain open posture
 L-lean slightly forward
 E-maintain good eye contact
 R-relax as much as possible.

- c. Practice is provided by an exercise combining active listening posture and hearing the content of the message (See Eagen, 1977).

SPEAKER	LISTENER	OBSERVER
1. Make one complex sentence about self.	1. Repeat statement verbatim.	1. Take notes on the speaker's exact message. Make sure that listener repeats the exact message before progressing to the next level of complexity.
2. Repeat above using two complex sentences	2. Repeat statement verbatim	
3. Repeat above using three complex sentences	3. Repeat statement verbatim	
Continue increasing the number of complex sentences until the time limit is up.*		2. Same as above 3. Same as above
4. Reverse roles and repeat #1, #2 and #3 with each person.		
5. Process in the large group		

*Each participant allowed five minutes to assume each of the above roles.

- 4) The next area of focus in non-verbal communication with specific emphasis upon multicultural dimensions. Materials abstracted from sundry sources focusing on cultural variables and their implications for teachers are used to introduce the participants to non-verbal communication. Diverse cultural groups have culturally specific behavior which may or may not have significance within another culture, but should be known by the other culture if effective communication is to occur. For example, oculosics (eye-to-eye contact); chronemics (verbal exchanges); proxemics (interpersonal space); kinesics (movement of the body); and haptics (touch) vary and are contingent upon culture and context.

- a. Cultural differences in eye contact and expression of emotions are the target non-verbal dimensions utilized in this workshop. A multi-group non-verbal experience adapted from Pfeiffer and Jones (1974), designed to demonstrate cultural differences and comfort levels with eye contact serves as the practice exercise. In this activity participants make two lines facing each other, and maintain eye contact for a specified period of time. They then move on and repeat this in a bicycle chain effect until each participant has maintained eye contact with each other participant.
- b. Practice is provided in discerning emotional experiences in a multicultural context by the following exercise.

PRINCIPAL

1. Recreate via fantasy an experience that elicited a certain emotional response for you (e.g., happiness, sadness, anger, excitement).
2. Role-Play this experience without using words.
3. Confirm/provide feedback on the accuracy of the observer's reading of your emotional state.
4. Process in the large group.

OBSERVER

1. Guess which state the person is experiencing.
2. What non-verbal cues influenced your response?

- 5) Empathy development requires the ability to attend/respond to the feelings (non-verbal) and content (verbal) involved in a message and, in that sense, requires use of all the skills developed in the previously described phases i.e., active listening, awareness of the connotation of non-verbal behavior, and sensitivity to certain emotional states. Practice in empathy development is the next area of focus; this is facilitated by the following exercise:

SPEAKER	LISTENER	OBSERVER
1. Talk about the most significant event that has happened to you in the past three months.	1. Listen, using all the skills you've developed up to this point. At occasional intervals, interject with your reading of the speaker's feeling and content e.g., you're feeling _____ because _____. NOTE: Do not interfere with the flow of the speaker's story.	1. Confirm the listener's interpretation of the speaker's message.
2. Confirm the listener and observer's interpretation of your message.	2. Listen. Get feedback on the accuracy of your interpretation of the cues.	2. Listen and get feedback on the accuracy of your interpretation of the cues.
3. Reverse roles until each participant has played all three roles.		
4. Process in the large group.		

- 6) The final segment consists of recommendations for application and improvement in the classroom and the multicultural community. This attempts to address the specific issues that arise in the initial surfacing of workshop needs and goals.

What Actually Happened

We contracted to do this workshop for the purpose of providing faculty/staff at an elementary school with skills that would enable them to effectively understand/communicate with parents of diverse cultural backgrounds and solicit their cooperation and support. The students at the school were of predominantly Black, Vietnamese and Hispanic origin. We arranged to do a daylong workshop one Saturday under the school's inservice training program. Ours was one of several workshops planned throughout the year in response to internal/external conflict. Participants were paid for attending these workshops.

We entered into this workshop experience with a neatly planned agenda. As Murphy's law implies, everything that can go wrong will go wrong. We soon learned that the particular needs of this group did not fit our neatly designed scheme.

Processing of the ice breaker exercise illuminated the following needs and goals of participants:

- 1) To develop listening skills
- 2) To develop the ability to decode messages
- 3) To develop ways to facilitate increased communication
- 4) To develop sensitivity toward others
- 5) To learn to reopen lines of communication that have been shut
due to confrontation or angry mis-communication
- 6) To acquire more knowledge about adult/child communications systems
- 7) To learn to modify existing styles of communication, particularly
in conflict situations
- 8) To acknowledge personal values, beliefs, attitudes of another.

The second exercise, presentation of communication relevant audio-visual transparencies, underscored existing multicultural conflict within the group, particularly concerning attitudes about the ramifications of

maintenance of eye contact. This took the form of one participant insisting that our society placed unnecessary emphasis on the maintenance of eye contact and made quantum personality assumptions on the lack of same; while another participant of a different ethnic group insisted that maintenance of eye contact was important, and argued that lack of same was indicative of dishonesty. This generated much discussion. The group was composed of: (1) two Hispanic females whose ages ranged from early-late 20s; (2) seven Black females, six of whom were in their early 20s and one who was in her mid 40s; and (3) nineteen White females, ten of which were in their 20s, four of which were in their 30s, and four of which were in their 40s; and (4) one White male, the principal, who was in his mid-late 40s.

Because of our need to resolve the group conflict as well as to facilitate a good workshop experience, we decided to insert the eye contact exercise at this point and focus upon non-verbal communication in general. We soon found that the strongest advocate of the necessity for eye contact had considerable difficulty maintaining eye contact. Observation revealed avoidance of eye contact, much giggling and general discomfort. This was very revealing and changed the mood of the group; subsequently, they were somewhat more receptive. Further processing enabled us to achieve some resolution and move on to the next phase.

We attempted to revert to the planned strategy and focus upon listening skills. However, resistance occurred as certain individuals asserted that they knew how to listen and wanted to learn something new. The transcript is as follows:

Participant: "I was hoping this workshop would be different. I already know how to listen and want to move beyond that."

Facilitator: "Would you be willing to briefly tell me what it is that you know and would like to move beyond?"

Participant: "I've been in these workshops before and want to learn something different."

Facilitator: "Fine. I hear and understand what you are saying. I'm asking you to help me not be redundant. Would you be willing to summarize the skills that you have, and would not like to repeat?"

Participant: "Well, I don't know exactly."

Facilitator: "Are you willing to see what you can learn from this workshop? If you have an attitude that you know what we're going to say that will interfere with your learning. I encourage you to give it a try."

Participant: "Okay"

With this resolved we moved on to the active listening posture and practice exercise as described earlier. The experiential phase proceeded without incident. During the processing phase, a young Black woman indicated that there was something she needed to say and felt the workshop atmosphere was conducive to having it said. She launched into a long, sometimes emotional, sometimes rambling discourse. The essence of her message was that the school was spending time/money on workshops (e.g., the present one) in an attempt to resolve conflict between the school and the community, when the intra-school (teacher, aides, principal, etc.) conflict was not currently acknowledged, let alone resolved. This stimulated the following important intra-group interactions which we facilitated/structured/guided in terms of constructive feedback: (1) Group feedback to an older Black woman about her lack of

participation and support to school activities in general. She was initially very resistive to this feedback and quick to defend herself verbally. We supported the feedback she was being given by using her behavior in the workshop as an example in the following manner:

Participant: (Responding to the feedback from the group). "Well this is Saturday afternoon and I've got better things to do with my time besides sit here and waste it on another workshop. I'm being paid for it so I have to be here but I don't have to participate."

(Note that she had said at the outset of the workshop that she was tired of going to workshops planned by the school because they were a waste of time and didn't accomplish very much. She sat knitting during most of the workshop and interjected occasionally.)

Facilitator: "What they're saying fits with the feeling I've had today."

Participant: "What's that."

Facilitator: "Well, you haven't said very much, but the times when you have, were very helpful and contributed a lot to the group; they listened to what you had to say. As you sat there knitting, I was aware that I missed your participation. When you participated, what you contributed was very beneficial; it could be even more beneficial if you chose to participate more."

Participant: Looks very pensive, but does not respond verbally.

(Note that she still didn't say much for the remainder of the workshop; but she did stop knitting and was very attentive non-verbally. When the workshop was over, she asked if we could come back and offer more such workshops.)

2. Group response and feedback to the same young outspoken Black woman who had initiated this process by stating that there was something she needed to say, and had subsequently questioned the motivation of the people in the room stating that they didn't care about the students or the school.

A. She received a very emotional, tearful response from an experienced White teacher in her early 30s who stated that she did indeed care and that she resented the Black woman's setting herself/her behavior up as the standard for caring. We processed this interaction and they subsequently contracted to spend some time together sharing indices of caring i.e., how each showed that they cared. They scheduled to begin the following week.

B. She also received feedback from an extremely quiet but attentive young Black woman who said she seldom talked but wanted to say something now. In a hesitant halting voice, she said that while she liked the outspoken Black woman she felt intimidated by her cutting remarks to others and chose to maintain distance from her. The outspoken woman seemed to ponder this feedback and was seen talking with the other woman at the close of the workshop.

3. Group feedback to the principal about their belief that his leadership style was inconsistent and lacked sufficient structure. He initially responded by asking for specific examples. Upon receiving these, he tended to rationalize and justify his behavior in each instance. We told him that feedback was usually given more freely to persons with receptive attitudes. We encouraged him to at least hear the feedback; if it did not fit, he could certainly discard it, and if it did fit, he had the option of considering what, if anything, to do about it. Meanwhile, we iterated to the group that feedback can be more easily heard if it is constructive; and constructive feedback entails: (a) a non-judgmental description of the behavior; (b) their response to the behavior; and (c) presentation of these in a non-accusatory fashion. This process and the resulting interactions extended well beyond

the scheduled workshop closing time. We ended this particular phase by having the group relate to the principal things that they also liked and appreciated about him.

We ended the workshop by summarizing what we had attempted to do and sharing our understanding of what had transpired. We underscored that while we had abandoned our neatly planned agenda, the whole workshop had been an exercise in communication, mis-communication, and the ramifications of both. We indicated that the group could benefit from some team-building interventions; and that once team-building/development was accomplished, team maintenance should be given some priority. We emphasized that this would better equip them to deal with issues within the school, with the parents and in the community-at-large.

Conclusion and Implications

Based on the data generated from this workshop, the following summary statements are made with implications as listed below:

1. Preconceived attitudinal sets and expectations have a tremendous impact on our openness to new experiences, receptivity to learning, and susceptibility to growth. If these preconceptions are negative they hinder learning and subsequent growth. Our preconceptions also impact our perceptions of others and our manner of approaching and interacting with others; in that regard, our preconceptions ultimately influence others' response to us. This translates readily into the classroom environment, and into interactions with students and parents. Negative preconceptions held by teachers hinder student performance, student learning, and student growth; hinder effective teacherstudent communication and teacher-parent communication; and stunt teacher growth. Restructuring negative preconceptions into positive preconceptions facilitates

creative and stimulating learning environments for teachers and students alike, as well as fosters good teacher-parent interactions.

2. Teacher awareness/understanding of multicultural perspectives and incorporation of these into curricular and extra-curricular activities fosters effective learning environments, better parent/community relations and better collegiality with peers.
3. Assigning motivation to the behavior of others should be avoided. It can only be second guessing and can effectively block two-way communication in general. This can be particularly true in linear relationships (e.g., teacher-student relationships) and does not foster a conducive learning climate.
4. Flexibility is an essential in the repertoire of the effective teacher. Decreasing resistance by students/parents is not accomplished by resisting the resistance; rather, it is accomplished by listening to the resistance, evaluating it for validity and incorporating this into change where necessary.
5. There are two parts to constructive feedback: describing, 1): one's response to 2): specific behavior by the other. Describing the behavior in a non-judgmental fashion, facilitates acceptance of the feedback. Accusations and caustic "dumping" can serve to intimidate and distance the other, and is a barrier to effective communication. This is true with children as well as adults. The ability to appropriately give constructive feedback is particularly critical for elementary teachers who operate daily in an environment where children's self-perceptions are easily permeable and, learning styles and self-concepts which will accompany the child throughout life are being formed.

6. When conflicts arise within the school and between the school and community, an adequate assessment of the issues and a commitment to deal with them should be the first order of business. Launching into remedial workshops without performing these measures first are, at best, temporary diversions and may create the impression of symptomatic relief, but will have no long-term effects. A commitment to explore the real rather than surface issues, may be initially more painful but can result in numerous long-term benefits.

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